

steve and jonathan against the future by judypoovey

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Summary:

Steve has found a niche as Hawkins' premiere nanny. He'll drag Jonathan into his money-making schemes kicking and screaming if he has to. In the process, they discover that they might actually be best friends.

steve and jonathan against the future

Author's Note:

This is silly and can be read as like, pre-Steve/Jonathan or pre-Jonathan/Nancy/Steve but it mostly focuses on their friendship because I didn't get enough of that in s2. If I have inspiration I might write a second part to it but for now it stands alone.

Whatever weird forces in the universe there were clearly wanted Jonathan Byers to accept that he was friends with Steve Harrington. Even when Steve was the singlemost embarrassing person in the world – such as when he was leading 6 children on leashes around town.

“What in the hell?” Jonathan asked, coming out of the store with a gallon of milk and just as many concerns.

“I got an idea the other night because I kept seeing ads in the paper,” he said. “Ever since the whole...” He didn’t explicitly say but Jonathan knew he meant Barbara. “People want someone to watch their kids and stuff, they don’t feel as safe.”

“So you’re a nanny now?” he asked.

“Hell yeah! Like three nights a week I go hang out with a pack of small people who think I’m cool and smart and their parents give me money and buy me pizza,” he said. “I know it won’t last so I’m capitalizing now. I even have Nance helping a few nights a week.”

Jonathan wasn’t sure how he’d missed that, but in the weeks after the Mind Flayer, his focus had been on Mom and Will and fixing their house.

“That’s cool.”

“If you wanna make some extra cash, I can bring you in,” he said.

“I don’t think anyone wants me babysitting their kids, Steve,” he countered with a shrug, as if it didn’t bother him, but most things did

bother him.

Steve frowned. "All right. Give me a call if you wanna grab some pizza later or something."

"Okay, I gotta get back to Hopper's."

Hopper's cabin was cramped now, with he and Eleven and all three Byers there while Jonathan and Hopper slogged through the damages at their house. His mom needed the company, though, and so did Will, who had taken a bright shine to El.

Jonathan slept there but spent as much time out as he could, either taking Will around town or hanging with Nancy and Steve or just wandering the woods with his camera.

He thought about the offer of extra money. His job didn't pay that great. It helped Mom with bills and he had a little bit for himself to save up, but that was it. NYU was a long way off.

He had time to save and he could take a gap year if he needed to, but the whole thing filled him with an anxiety that he hated. He'd prefer fighting another Demogorgon. He didn't think he could get Steve to beat NYU admissions with a bat, at least.

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Steve Harrington quickly became the premiere babysitter of Hawkins under-13 population, but his favorite charges were still Dustin, Lucas, Mike, and Max. Will came along sometimes, but Mrs. Byers was still rightfully a little overprotective.

They were seeing a movie this afternoon, Will in tow. Steve had even called Chief Hopper (who kinda scared him, though he wouldn't admit that to the kids) to see if their little friend Jane could tag along. Hopper had said no, but to tell Mike that they could come over on Saturday to play their weird Dungeon game.

His words, not Steve's!

The tension and unrest around Barb's disappearance (and the subsequent revelation of her death) had made parents jumpy about

their kids going out alone, and as a result Steve was drowning in calls, good word-of-mouth being his new best friend.

“What are you going to do when you go away for college?” Dustin asked him after the movie.

“Hmm?”

“I mean, you won’t be able to hang out with us anymore. You’ll have to get like, a real job.”

“Nah, I’m...” It was still the slightest bit embarrassing, but he had to learn to admit it. “I’m gonna take some classes at the community college and work for my dad when I graduate, I’ll still be around.” His college admission prospects had been looking grim, but night classes were within his grasp and he could figure his own stuff out and please his dad at the same time, so it was working out okay.

And his dad was helping him manage all the money so he didn’t go “blowing it on hairspray and stupid shit”.

(His words, not Steve’s.)

“You’ll still be able to hang out?” Dustin asked, his face brightening.

“Yeah, of course. And I mean, school doesn’t even start until next August.”

“Yeah but with the way our parents are freaking out, we won’t be allowed outside on our own until we’re at least 16.”

Steve laughed, because he knew that it would pass, and the kids would be out riding their bikes and not being walked around by an 18-year-old dumbass with too much free time. But at 13, things like that seemed like they could so easily be permanent.

When they stopped on the way back to the Wheelers’ for ice cream, an ad in the paper caught his eye (he liked to pretend to read the paper while babysitting to make sure he looked mature).

BABYSITTER WANTED.

The address was listed a few towns over and the brief text explained someone was looking for a child-minder for their upcoming wedding. He took the paper and shoved it in his back pocket before he left, and once the Party (their phrase, not his), had been safely delivered home, he dialed the number and left a message on a perky answering machine.

“Hi, my name is Steve Harrington, I saw your ad for a babysitter for your wedding and I was wondering if you had filled the position? I have references and lots of experience with kids. Give me a call back.” He rattled off his phone number and then had a thought. “And if you’re looking for a great professional photographer, I can get you one at a steep discount,” he said brightly.

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He got the call back the next day as he walked in from school. The bride sounded tired, but nice.

“We’re having the reception in the rec center of the church,” she explained. “But their in-house child person is going to be on vacation, so I told them I could just find my own. I didn’t even want kids at the thing, but my sister refuses to leave the house without her precious angels.” He could hear her rolling her eyes behind the phone, and he was fondly reminded of Nancy.

“How many?”

“6 or 7. Between 3 and 11.”

“Cool. I can definitely handle that.”

“And this photographer?” she asked, sounding hopeful. “Everyone we spoke with wanted to charge so much for it, we had kind of resigned ourselves to just having grandma and her Polaroid take care of it.”

“He’s pretty young, just starting out, so he’d do it pretty cheap, and I know for a fact he’s good,” he said confidently, blithely inconsiderate of the fact that he probably should have asked Jonathan before volunteering him. He knew that he picked up photography odd-jobs around town, how was this any different?

“Can we all meet sometime soon?”

“I have Sunday afternoon open this week, could that work?”

“I can squeeze you two in,” she said with a laugh. “Where are you from?”

“Hawkins.”

“Really? That town where that girl died?” she asked, shocked.

Steve’s heart dropped. “Yeah, it was really sad. I know you’re in Pawnee, we can meet you there so you don’t need to make the drive.”

“That would be amazing. One PM on Sunday? There’s a place called JJ’s. Great waffles.”

“Sounds amazing.”

They said their goodbyes and hung up, and Steve called the Byers’ house immediately.

“Hey, Will, is your brother around?” he asked when the telltale soft voice answered the phone.

“Yeah, let me go get him.” He heard the kid yell for Jonathan and then a few distant footsteps.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Jonathan. Wanna grab some pizza tonight?” he asked, the picture of casual.

“Uh, sure. Should I invite Nancy?”

“If you want! I know she’s freaking out about exams and stuff.”

Jonathan chuckled. “Yeah, she’s color-coding her color-coding.”

Steve snorted. “See you there at 7?”

“Sure.”

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Jonathan managed to pull Nance away from her studies for pizza with Steve, somehow. He knew she was still feeling badly about how they broke up, but Jonathan had come to realize at some point that the three of them were meant to be a team. The year he'd spent not hanging out with Nancy and Steve after the Demogorgon had been garbage, and they hadn't been able to help Will until they'd all united, after all.

Plus, he didn't think that Steve could ever really have ulterior motives. It was *Steve*.

How wrong he was.

They sat down and ordered their food and Steve immediately dropped the bomb.

"I got us a job."

"Us?" Nancy repeated.

"Me and Jonathan, I meant."

"What?"

"I was looking at ads in the paper to get more jobs, and this lady wants a babysitter for her wedding and I offered your services!" he said, brightly.

Jonathan exchanged a look with Nancy, expecting his own incredulity mirrored, but instead saw her smiling a little too much. "I can't photograph a wedding. It's so...commercial. It's bad enough they have me doing school dances now," he said. He wanted to be artistic, not take posed pictures of rich women in poofy dresses.

"Dude, you could make so much money doing this," he said. "Weddings are only ever on the weekends and people pay out the ass for them. It'd be worth it to sell out just a little, right?" Steve knew money was a sensitive subject for him, and he was exploiting it maliciously. He was being oddly...practical.

Wedding photography.

"I'm meeting with the woman in Pawnee on Sunday. Come with, and if you don't want to, we'll just quote her a bad price and take our leave, right?"

Nancy nudged him. "You should do it."

He sighed. "Fine."

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Even though they had been something sort of resembling friendly acquaintances (and partners in monster killing) for over a year now, this was the first time that Steve and Jonathan had ever hung out. Ever. The few times they had since the Mind Flayer incident, Nancy had been there to mediate.

So, suffice to say, Steve felt a little odd about the whole thing. He liked Jonathan. Jonathan made Nancy happy and was a good person underneath the cynical outer layer. However, their common ground started with Nancy and ended with interdimensional monsters that seemed intent on eating Jonathan's brother, so.

Topics of conversation were limited.

"Did Dustin ever tell you about Dart?" he asked.

"Dart?"

"The demodog?" Steve offered.

"That thing you put in Mom's fridge?"

"That one wasn't Dart, but yeah."

"I think he mentioned it," Jonathan said, his tone dry.

Steve launched into the play-by-play, the fateful decision that led him to becoming Hawkins' premiere babysitter and monster basher. Jonathan responded with the full details of how he and Nancy had exposed Hawkins' Lab. Steve was smart enough to know some details

had been omitted for sensitivity.

It took up the majority of the drive to Pawnee, where they found the diner and the bride waiting outside for them.

“I’m Steve, this is Jonathan,” Steve said, immediately shaking her hand. Jonathan just awkwardly nodded.

“I’m Helen, it’s so nice to meet you.”

They went inside, ordering their breakfast from JJ himself. A young man with an impressive moustache was eating a mountain of sausage and eggs across from them, and it took all of Steve’s charisma not to be distracted by that.

Helen was a smart lady who asked all the right questions – Steve had gotten hand-written references from a few of his most satisfied moms (Mrs. Henderson and Ms. Byers) and Jonathan had brought a couple of his own pictures.

They ate some of the best waffles they’d ever had and agreed on a price that satisfied all three of them. Jonathan looked a little gobsmacked at how much Helen had said someone else had wanted to charge her.

When they left, a takeout box full of waffles for Jane, he was clearly in his own head.

“Whatcha thinkin’?”

“You said weddings are just a weekend thing, right?” he asked.

Steve nodded.

“If I got what she’s paying me for a wedding every weekend between now and graduation, I’d be able to pay for my first year of college,” he said. “Or at least, really close.”

Steve tried to hide his amusement at being proven oh-so-very right and instead gave what he hoped was a very supportive “oh yeah?”.

“There’s no way we can book one *every* weekend, though. For a

whole year and a half?" He messed with his hair a little and sighed.

"But, hey, just a thought, my whole babysitting thing is taking off. Everyone in Hawkins wants a piece. Maybe we could...do business together."

"Babysitting and photography don't intersect all that often, Steve," he said, rolling his eyes.

Steve huffed. "Look, I'm just saying, you could advertise with me and we could answer ads together and all this shit and we could totally find work. You deserve to go to college, right? If you're worried about it, this is a good way to at least try to bring in the cash."

Jonathan looked like he had to concede that point. "Okay."

"It might feel like selling out, but you know what? Sometimes, you gotta sell out to get by," he said. Then he cringed. "Ugh, I sounded like my dad there. Don't tell anyone, all right?"

"I'm telling Nancy as soon as we get back," he said, leaning against the car window, the smallest of smiles on his face.

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By the time Helen's wedding rolled around, Jonathan had book three more for the last few weeks of fall. He was a jumble of nerves, and maybe that nervousness explained why he was letting Steve do his hair for the wedding.

"Look, you don't need to go crazy," he said, his fingers sticky with some sort of absurd product that Jonathan would never touch on a normal day. But here he was, in a borrowed suit jacket and his worn-out dress shoes, letting Steve Harrington fuss over his hair.

Mom and Nancy were both clearly laughing at them.

"You look nice," she said, touching his arm. "Can I get a picture of you two?"

"Sure," Steve said, gregariously throwing his arm over Jonathan's shoulder while Joyce fumbled with her Polaroid.

Steve had a great time at the wedding. The church playroom was well-equipped, but some of the older kids were not distracted by brightly colored blocks and puzzles, so instead, he talked to them about what high school was like.

“Are you taking notes?” he asked a blond girl, who nodded enthusiastically. He didn’t say anything else, he just shrugged and kept on keeping on.

When the last kid in his charge was picked up by his parents, he went upstairs to see the dwindling party loading up on the last few slices of cake. Jonathan was in the corner, looking exhausted as he fended off the grandmother of the groom, who was clearly infatuated.

“Now, now, Dottie, this one’s mine,” he said genially. Dottie chuckled and went to rejoin her husband.

“Have fun?” Steve asked.

“Yeah,” he responded. “I...I actually really like this. Everyone’s so happy. I like that. I haven’t really taken pictures of people since...” There was a terse pause, because they both understood each other. Since the weirdness last year, since Barb and the pictures of Nancy that Steve knows Jonathan would apologize every second of every day for if Nancy didn’t tell him to shut up the first twenty-two times.

“Last year.”

“Last year,” he agreed.

“I can’t wait to see them,” he said, successfully diverting the subject.

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Steve was babysitting Holly Wheeler and Erica Sinclair when Jonathan called him.

“Mr. Clarke wants to hire me for his wedding,” he said immediately, not even saying hi.

It had been a month since Helen’s wedding, her pictures had been delivered much to her delight.

("I knew I didn't look fat," she said. "My mother-in-law is such a bitch.")

Word had spread fairly quickly, and he had already booked several other appointments. Family pictures, mostly, and now another wedding.

"That's awesome. Isn't he like Will's favorite teacher?" he asked, shushing Erica.

Erica laughed shrilly.

She was so mean, Steve wasn't sure what to do with her.

"Yeah. Want to come as my assistant?"

"Photographers have assistants? Do I have to wear a sparkly dress or something?"

"I said my assistant, not Vana White," he snarked.

Steve laughed. "Okay. I can do that."

He hung up and turned to see Erica looking up at him expectantly. "If you're so cool, why do you hang out with such neeeeerds?"

"You are so mean," he said under his breath, unable to answer the question.

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The newly minted Mrs Clarke slipped Steve a twenty just for helping out, Jonathan observed as he laughed, wrangling his brother and friends while also taking pictures.

Steve had a knack for finding photo-worthy moments and steering Jonathan to them, which was actually much more than he had expected from his friend. He'd really only invited Steve because he'd helped him get the job, not because he expected him to be a worthwhile assistant.

Jonathan watched him dance with Mr. Clarke's mother, laughing and

looking far too at-home in a suit for an 18-year-old boy and was happy he was there.

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Business did well enough that Mr. Harrington demanded to make sure Jonathan was being responsible with his money. A savings account was established. A checkbook was gotten. Tax write-offs were explained.

Steve was inexplicably nervous about Jonathan interacting with his parents, who were well-meaning but distant and a little brusque. His old friends had always impressed the Harringtons to an appropriate degree, but Jonathan was the first friend he'd ever had that actually mattered, and he didn't want his dad to say something insensitive about Will or his mother to make an innocently offensive comment about Joyce.

So he was hovering nervously until they were finally released, Jonathan carrying a too-large stack of folders and papers that he was meant to keep up with.

They met Nancy for burgers and she laughed at Steve's obvious anxiety.

"He didn't try to tell the golf story, did he?" she asked.

"Golf story?" Jonathan repeated, answering her question with his bemusement.

"He has this one joke he tells all of my friends about when I was five and tried to play golf, it's really terrible," Steve said, but he failed to stop Nancy from launching into the joke. She told it better than his dad, though, and Jonathan was laughing too hard to eat by the time their food came.

Begrudgingly, Steve laughed too.

--

Winter break came and left, and Jonathan was almost surprised when Steve continued his pattern of hanging out with he and Nancy, even

in the halls of Hawkins High. He was unconcerned with his image, apparently.

“If this school is gonna clamber to worship a guy who’s in his third year as a high school senior, I don’t give a shit what they think of me,” Steve lied convincingly, jerking his thumb towards Billy. The fact was that Steve had seen too much darkness to find any value in a popularity contest.

Jonathan understood.

But he was sure Billy Hargrove had a lot to do with it.

They were getting lunch together one cold, dreary Monday, when Steve started talking about the future.

“I think I might do the criminal justice program in the fall,” he said. “I could go to police academy and come back and work in Hawkins.”

“You could leave Hawkins, Steve,” Jonathan said, not sure if it was reassuring or condescending. He had trouble with that.

“Look, no, listen. Hawkins isn’t a normal place, you know? That thing...those demogorgons...they could come back at any moment. And if you’re in New York and Nancy is at college in the city...we might not be able to help the kids. But if I stay here to keep an eye on things, I’d be able to warn you guys and we could stay on top of it.”

Jonathan had never heard something so well-reasoned from Steve. Even his best ideas had an edge of “just go along with it” to them. It always worked out, but how Steve got from initial idea to successful end result was always nebulous and vague.

“That makes sense,” Nancy said. “And I can do more investigating while I’m in the city.”

In the end, Jonathan nodded too. “Good. We keep watch over Hawkins but don’t sacrifice our futures. Sounds good.”

He got up to toss his lunch and dodged Billy, who was sulking around the edges of the cafeteria.

--

Steve was re-wallpapering the Byers' living room with Jonathan when Will came in, Jane in tow.

"Do you need help?" he asked.

"We got it," Jonathan said. "You two don't get into any trouble."

They both laughed in a way that made it fully clear they weren't taking them seriously. Joyce came back from her grocery run looking less frazzled than Steve had seen her in a while. The house was nearly repaired, so that had a lot to do with it.

"How much do I owe you?" she asked.

"Oh no, for them it's free. Happy to help."

"Owe him?" Jonathan asked. "He wasn't babysitting, I was here the whole time too." He paused and glared at his mom. "He wasn't babysitting me!"

"I mean..."

Steve laughed, dodging a tossed paintbrush. "Hey, hey, come on. You must be cranky since you didn't get a nap today."

Jonathan stormed off to his room, cranking up his records as loud as he could, but when Steve walked back there to see if he wanted dinner, the door was open and Jonathan was smiling.

"You're going to visit, when I go to New York, right?" Jonathan asked.

"Duh. Maybe I'll be a fancy nanny for some rich asshole during the summers and make some more cash," he joked.

"Good."